Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting
Wednesday 18 March 2026 at 5pm, at Diverse Education Centre, Retford

Trustee name	Initials	A = absence
M Blore	MB	A
A Hardie	AH	
I Hylan	IH	A
J Robertson	JMR	
J Rolph	JR	
D Schwarz (Chair)	DS	
I Storey	IS	
R Vizma	RV	

Quorum required: 3
Trustees Present: 6

In attendance (staff or other invited persons):

Staff name	Initials	Role	A = Absence
Mr D Cotton	DC	Chief Executive Officer and Accounting Officer	
Mrs J Harrison Hill	JHH	Company Secretary and Governance Professional	

Agenda item number	Item	Action by who/ when
1. DAT/88/2526	**Tour of Horizons Academy** L Beesley, Principal at Horizons Academy gave the Trustees a tour of the new school building detailing how the students interact and use the facilities.	
2. DAT/89/2526	**Apologies for absence** Apologies were received and agreed for I Hylan and M Blore.	
3. **DAT/90/2526**	**Declaration of interest and notification of any changes to declaration made** There were no declarations of interest, either direct or indirect, for any items of business on the agenda. The Chair asked if anyone had any declarations to update. No new declarations of interests were made.	
4. **DAT/91/2526**	**Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 4 February 2026** The public and confidential minutes were agreed and approved.	
5. **DAT/92/2526**	**Matters Arising:** ***DAT/68/2526 Executive Pay*** ***Action**: Meeting between Mr Cotton, Mr Schwarz and Mr Rolph to be scheduled for early–mid March to review proposed policy.* D Schwarz informed the Board that he and J Rolph had recently met with D Cotton to discuss the Executive Pay Policy. A number of minor amendments are in the process of being made to the documents	

	covering both the pay policy and the executive pay procedures. As part of this work, roles and responsibilities relating to the CEO Review Committee are being clarified. Revised documentation will be brought to the next Board meeting for formal approval. **DAT/53/2526 Follow up Chairs and Vice Chairs of Governors conference** ***Action:*** *Mr Schwarz to develop a template for LAC visits.* ***Action:*** *Mrs Benson, Interim Head of Governance to inform Chairs of intention to re-establish programme of trustee LAC visits with aim to start in summer term.* ***Action:*** *Mrs Harrison Hill to develop programme of visits for summer term.* D Schwarz reported that he had shared a draft new template to support Local Academy Committee (LAC) visits. trustees were requested to provide comments before it is finalised. The intention is to re-establish the programme during the summer term. Trustees were asked to send any further suggestions to D Schwarz, and a final version will be circulated in due course. **Trustees asked** whether LAC Chairs had provided any comments. Mr Schwarz noted that most Chairs commented that during one to one discussions with Chairs they had expressed that the value of relationship building and that trustee presence is beneficial. **Action:** J Harrison Hill will circulate the schedule of LAC meetings so trustees can identify when they are available to attend. **A further question was raised** about the purpose of the visits, specifically whether a written report is required, or whether reporting by exception would be more appropriate. **Action:** D Schwarz will prepare a final summary outlining the visit framework and proposed approach to feedback **Action:** N Benson to inform Chairs of Governors that this schedule will restart in the summer term. ***DAT/76/2526 Strategic Plan*** ***Action:*** *questionnaire to collate responses from Leadership, LACs and Executives.* ***Action:*** *Additional meeting to be arranged once information collected for Board to review responses. Mr Cotton to inform Governance Professional of timeframe for meeting.* D Cotton updated that the questionnaires have been distributed with the deadline for teams to respond before the academies break up for Easter for collation. **Action:** J Harrison Hill to liaise with D Cotton on date for Trustee meeting to discuss strategic plan. ***DAT/85/2526 Chairs Correspondence*** ***Action:*** *Letter from Chair of Board on behalf of trustees with recognition of appreciation for A Elway.* A letter was sent on behalf of the Board. This item is now complete.	JHH DS NB JHH
6. DAT/93/2526	**Trustee questions/discussion on pre-reading pack** Documents: Chief Executive Officer Board Report March 2026 Appendix 1: Safeguarding, attendance, exclusion report March 2026 Appendix 2: Term dates 2027/2028 Appendix 3: NGA – schools white paper summary Appendix 4: Risk register July 2025 Appendix 5: Risk register January 2026 – reworked example were previously received as part of the Board pre-reading pack.	

	The Chief Executive Officer Board Report detailed the following areas: Introduction, vision, ethos and strategic direction of the organisation, educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and financial and business performance of the organisation. From the report D Cotton highlighted that Bracken Lane Primary whole school remodelling and the Horizons Academy ribbon cutting events had been held and both were well attended and positive events.	
DAT/94/2526	Term Time dates 2027/2028 approval Discussion was held on the request to align Walton Academy term dates with Lincolnshire County Council. **Trustees approved** the term dates for 2027/2028 for schools within the trust for academies in Nottinghamshire County Council and Walton Academy in Lincolnshire County Council (appendix 2). The NGA summary of the white paper was shared (appendix 3).	
DAT/95/2526	SEND Hub at Samuel Barlow Academy D Cotton updated the Board on the significant change application for the establishment of a SEND Hub at Samuel Barlow Primary Academy, designed to provide places for 24 children with SEND. Nottinghamshire County Council has confirmed that it will fund all required renovation works, totalling £1 million. Approval for the significant change is currently awaited from the Department for Education. Once this approval is received, the project will be able to proceed. **Trustees asked** whether any temporary arrangements could be put in place if facilities were not ready. D Cotton clarified that accepting children into the SEND Hub without formal significant change approval would constitute a breach of the Funding Agreement and so no progress would be started until this was agreed from the DfE.	
DAT/96/2526	Income generation officer appointment D Cotton informed the Board that an Income Generation Officer had been appointed. The postholder will work alongside C Saxelby, Executive principal, to strengthen links with schools and community partners, build relationships, and identify opportunities beyond income alone e.g. apprenticeships and partnerships. **Trustees asked** which committee would receive reports on this activity. D Cotton clarified that income generation activity would be reported through the Finance & Resources Committee. Strategic partnership developments of significant scale would also be reported to the Governance & Partnership Committee and the Board. **Trustees noted** that the role had been described as broader than generating money and sought clarification on how success would be measured. It was clarified that KPIs will be developed as the role becomes more fully established. These will include the broader elements of the role to ensure opportunities beyond income are captured.	
DAT/97/2526	Hucknall Sixth Form Centre – Disposal An update was provided that the disposal of the Hucknall Sixth Form Centre is expected to be signed this week. **Trustees queried** whether proceeds from the sale could be used towards funding a new headquarters building. D Cotton advised this may be possible particularly if the new premises included space that could be designated as alternative provision or another educational function.	

DAT/98/2526 DAT/99/2526	**Trustees noted** that approval was already in place for D Schwarz or J Rolph to sign documentation on behalf of trustees when required for the sale. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes School rebuild programme **Trustees were updated** that the DfE had briefed G Corban and N Holmes regarding the rebuild of The Holgate Academy. The anticipated project start date is quarter 2 of 2026/2027, with a project team being formed for the planning stage beginning in July/August. Completion is expected to take approximately four years, taking the timeline to 2030. **Trustees asked** if the academy staff had been informed of this information and it was confirmed that the information is currently being shared with the Principal for informing staff. The Board was also informed that the DfE had opened another round of submissions for the school rebuild programme (250 schools), with submissions due by 27 April 2026. The Trust intends to submit applications for all schools that have not had major rebuilds, significant refurbishments or are not PFI sites. These are: The Holgate Academy Walton Academy Queen Elizabeth's Academy Tuxford Primary Academy Hillocks Primary Academy Redgate Primary Academy **Trustees asked** how many rebuild projects the Trust could manage in parallel. D Cotton clarified that potentially all, as consultants could be commissioned to support this if required. **Trustees noted** that Redgate Primary Academy is a high-priority locally and asked whether this could be reflected in the submission. D Cotton noted that efforts to increase places working with the local authority are underway for Redgate Primary Academy with increasing capacity improving the likelihood of success for a school rebuild alongside SEND being a national priority. **Trustees queried** the complexities referenced at Queen Elizabeth's Academy. D Cotton explained the Trust occupies the site as a leaseholder to the Queen Elizabeth Endowed Trust, which must approve any changes. The main building is listed. Other buildings could be rebuilt, so a partial rebuild would be the likely approach. J Rolph **noted** that the Finance & Resources Committee had discussed The Holgate Academy rebuild timeline and **raised** the need to balance investment in the academy over the next four years while ensuring current students experience a suitable environment. Current Year 7 pupils will not see the new building and require adequate provision in the interim. D Cotton responded that the DfE had advised that if significant investment is required, they should be informed, as they do not wish to allocate public funds to facilities that may be demolished within four years.	
DAT/100/2526	Operational Excellence **Trustees queried** the reference to seven points in the Operational Excellence report, as only six could be identified, and asked whether something had been missed or if they were bullet points rather than seven improvement areas. **Action:** D Cotton confirmed he would check and clarify the seven points within the report.	DC

DAT/101/2526	**Trustees noted** that in all businesses there is a degree of process wastage and were happy with the approach to address one area at a time. Safeguarding **Confidential:** This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes	
DAT/102/2526	Committee minute reports questions/discussion Documents: Finance and Resources Committee minutes 9 March 2026(draft) and financial report were previously received by the Board as part of the pre-reading pack. J Rolph, Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee, provided an update of the committee meeting which had reviewed the financial risk position for the remainder of the year, which currently appears more positive than negative. Two key factors contributing to the improved bottom line were highlighted as the sale of the Hucknall site, and the reduction in employer contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The year-end position was described as looking reasonable. A second forecast will be produced once the February management accounts are finalised, after which the Trust will begin construction of the 2026/2027 budget. The Committee had also reviewed the Pay Policy, including the separation of general pay and executive pay functions. The Gender Pay Report, approved at Finance & Resources, was considered. The report shows that while the Trust works to employ a diverse range of genders, the issue is not one of equal pay but of the types of roles more commonly taken up by women. Analysis had been provided to isolate and show the impact of this. The majority of teaching staff undertaking the same roles are paid the same amounts. **Trustees asked** if there was a difference in UPS pay between men and women and it was clarified that they were paid identical payments. **Confidential:** This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. The committee had discussed how the Trust should be defined whether as a large trust or medium-large and where it sits in sector benchmarks. Operational Excellence work is also examining these issues. D Cotton noted that benchmarking reports show many trusts outsource functions such as marketing, cleaning and catering, while also generating traded income from services. Additional income streams, including those linked to Operational Excellence, are being explored.	
DAT/103/2526	Audit Tender J Rolph reported that four submissions had been received in the tender process for audit services. These had been scored, and two clear front-runners emerged: Smith Cooper and Bishop Fleming. A panel consisting of J Rolph, I Storey, V Williams and G Corban will meet both firms next Tuesday to receive presentations, after which a recommendation will be made to the Board. **Trustees discussed** the justification for changing auditors and advantages and disadvantages. It was agreed that if the recommendation is to remain with Smith Cooper, this will simply be communicated. If the recommendation is to move to a new auditor, a Microsoft Teams meeting will be arranged for discussion.	

DAT/104/2526	**Action:** A Teams meeting will be set up for Wednesday, 23 March for Trustees who are able to attend to receive the recommendation, if the panel have chosen to remain with Smith Cooper this meeting will be cancelled. <u>Standards and Outcomes committee</u> Documents: Standards and Outcomes Committee minutes 11 March 2026 were previously received by the Board as part of the pre-reading pack. R Vizma, Chair of the Standard and Outcomes Committee, provided an update of the committee meeting which had discussed safeguarding matters, Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes Safeguarding staff concerns were reviewed, alongside insights into the presentation of safeguarding data, including how gender and ethnicity information is reported. Suspensions and exclusions data was also considered, with discussion on how this data is presented to provide clarity and early identification of patterns. The Committee received a presentation on the SEND White Paper and its implications for schools. This included an overview of the SEND resources that will be required within mainstream settings for pupils currently accessing specialist provision, the introduction of mandatory staff training, and potential opportunities for the Trust to develop and facilitate such training internally. An update was provided on The Holgate Academy from the Executive Principal, covering progress outcomes, attendance, and suspensions. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes	JHH
DAT/105/2526	<u>Governance & Performance Committee Update</u> Documents: Governance and Partnership Committee minutes 23 February 2026 were previously received by the Board as part of the pre-reading pack. D Schwarz, Chair of the Governance and Partnership Committee, provided an update of the committee meeting. A number of these areas have already been discussed within the Board meeting. Following a trustee's query, D Schwarz clarified that the meeting on 10 June 2026 relates to a meeting of LAC Chairs and Vice-Chairs, scheduled to align with the development of the Trust's strategic plan.	
DAT/106/2526	<u>Audit and Risk Committee</u> Documents: Audit and Risk Committee minutes 2 March 2026 were previously received by the Board as part of the pre-reading pack. I Storey, Chair of Audit and Risk Committee, provided an update of the committee meeting. Explaining that several internal audit reports are scheduled towards the end of the academic year. An advisory report on AI is awaited, and the written report has not yet been received. The Committee will consider topics for the internal audit programme for the next academic year at its next meeting. Sub-committees are invited to suggest any areas they feel would be suitable for internal audit so these can be passed to I Storey. A draft programme will be finalised in September for presentation at the next meeting. The Committee also approved the Risk Policy and reviewed the associated procedures.	
DAT/107/2526	<u>Update on executive pay progress</u> This item was discussed in agenda item 5.	
7.	**Trustee recruitment update**	

DAT/108/2526	The Board were informed that currently two potential applicants interest in the role of trustee which are being explored. N Benson, Head of Governance is exploring how the trust currently recruit trustees, looking at the broader needs across governance and how to market more effectively for trustee and governor roles. Inspiring leaders has not yet been successful in introducing suitable candidates. Following **Trustees querying** if any of the applicants would broaden the diversity of the Board, it was confirmed that one applicant was female.	
8. DAT/109/2526	**Risk Register Update** Documents: Risk Register July 2025, Risk Register January 2026-reworked example, Risk policy and Risk procedures were previously received by the Board in the pre-reading pack. I Storey explained that work is underway to amend the format of the Risk Register as part of an evolutionary process. Proposed changes include providing a more detailed description of each risk and clearer articulation of the associated consequences. The sections referring to actions to reduce risk scores will be removed, as these belong in other documents, such as Strategic Objectives. Further work is planned to level-set scoring across the register. Some of the development work on the text, descriptions and score alignment sits with the Executive Team. It was proposed that they will prepare a first draft for the committee to review, which will then feed into the next audit and risk committee before a final version is brought to the Board for approval. Document Risk Register January 2026- reworked example shows a number of example risks demonstrating how the revised format could work and are for illustration only. **Trustees noted** that the examples were useful in understanding the purpose of the new format and that the proposed structure appeared more digestible. **Trustees commented** that risks had been made more specific enabling more targeted actions and clearer identification of impact and probability. **Trustees asked** if this approach may lead to more distinct risks being identified. I Storey responded that this is possible, with some risks being considered low-level and sit at academy or LAC level rather than on the Trust's principal register. **Trustees asked** whether the first iteration may produce a longer list of risks. D Cotton explained that the intention is to separate out the principal risks and clarify the controls in place. Executives and sub-committees will work through which risks should be considered principal, linking to controls and appetite statements. Risks will be defined at a more detailed level. **Trustees discussed** the approach to narrow down the risks to the main ones. D Cotton explained that the intention is to bring forward only the key risks, with committees able to suggest additions before the register goes to the Board. Once the new format is in place, the risk report will highlight high scores (including inherent risks) and any risks where scoring is out of line with appetite. A summary report will be generated from this and will form the initial document reviewed by the Board. **Trustees raised** the question of the balance between a risk being specific to an academy and identifying Trust-wide risks. It was clarified that there is no simple answer, but if a risk at a single academy has significant impact, it could still feature on the overall	

	Trust Register. However, most Trust-level risks are likely to affect multiple academies. Next Steps were agreed as the Executive Team will present draft revised registers for discussion at each subcommittee meetings. The Audit and Risk Committee will then review the outcome before the final draft is taken to the Board.	
9. DAT/110/2526	**Approvals required by Board:** **Approval agreed** by the Board for: Term time dates for 2027/2028. Hucknall sixth form centre sale sign off.	
10. DAT/111/2526	**Statutory Updates, Changes to legal documents and Companies House filing** No changes to report	
11. DAT/112/2526	**Annual Requirements** No annual requirements to report	
12. DAT/113/2526	**Chairs Correspondence** Document: Hucknall consent to dispose of non-playing field land letter was previously received as part of the pre-reading pack.	
13. DAT/114/2526	**Determination of Confidentiality** Trustees considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved: – An item in agenda item 6 DAT/98/2526 would remain confidential until a final decision has been made. – An item in agenda item 6 DAT/101/2526 would remain confidential due to the sensitive nature of the student-related matter. – An item in agenda item 6 DAT/102/2526 would remain confidential until complete. – An item in agenda item 6 DAT/104/2526 would remain confidential due to the sensitive nature of the student-related matter. – An item in agenda item 6 DAT/104/2526 would remain confidential until completed. **Equalities Act consideration** The Board had considered the Equality Act throughout its Discussions in particular around the Gender gap discussion and diversity of the trustee recruitment. **Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles** The Board confirmed that all decisions had been made in accordance with the seven Nolan principles. **Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission** Trustees resolved that no items required reporting to the Charities Commission	
14. DAT/115/2526	Date and time of next meeting: **Wednesday 13 May 2026, 5.00pm** at Retford Education Centre	

The meeting closed at:19.09

Minutes agreed by Chair: